Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

CHATS WITH STUDENTS ABOUT BOOKS

RAYMOND W. PENCE
DePauw University

One of the most fascinating problems with which the teacher of English may, if he wishes, grapple is that of the student's outside reading. By outside reading I mean his reading beyond the requirements of any course, the reading for which he receives no actual credit on the records, the reading he wants to do voluntarily for himself if he only knows *what* to read.

I think all teachers of English, especially teachers of Freshmen in high school and Freshmen in college—that is, teachers of those students who have just passed out of an old into a new existence—have frequently had a student say, "Oh, I used to read a great deal, but it seems lately I have been so busy, and, besides, I don't know what to read."

I shall outline what I have been attempting to do with college Freshmen in stimulating their interest in general reading.

As a result of my own experience I have worked on the principle that to have the greatest possible interest in a book one must feel that someone else has also been interested in it. I am sure that I derive more pleasure from a book if someone, whose opinion I respect, has been enthusiastic over it and has urged me to read it, for his enthusiasm has become contagious. The book has in some way established a bit of common ground between us. In my recommendations of books, therefore, I limit myself to those that I myself have thoroughly enjoyed, with the hope that my enthusiasm and enjoyment may become the enthusiasm and enjoyment of my friend, for in this work the Freshman is considered a personal friend rather than simply as a student.

It is evident, then, that the logical way of working out the plan is through personal conference with the student. As such consultations are not always possible, nor always desired by the student, I have made out typewritten booklets of recommended readings. These have been classified simply as to form, that is,

novels, short stories, poetry, drama, etc. The list has been kept narrow purposely; for a formidable array of titles confuses the student and undoubtedly dismays him until he gives the whole thing up in disgust. There has been no endeavor to make it a list of the "best books," or anything of the sort. I have simply listed some volumes that I have enjoyed and that I think show a reasonable proportion between pleasure and profit—so far, at least, as my present purpose is concerned. They are neither the most pleasurable books in the world nor the most profitable; however, there is enough pleasure to secure interest and enough profit to justify the student in spending the time it takes to read them. The ideal, then, is confessedly not high. I have not attempted to entice students to read the best books of all time. My main object has not been to persuade students to read literature, but to persuade them to read. I have kept in mind a very suggestive statement by Professor Phelps in his *Teaching in School and College* to the effect that it is better to have a youngster read trash than to have him read nothing at all. In order first of all to secure interest I have, with one or two exceptions, limited myself to the works of living writers. For my present purpose it is of secondary consideration that some of these books may be of an abiding literary value.

Now as to the plan. I tell the Freshmen that a typewritten list of suggested readings which I have prepared for them is at the disposal of any who may be interested in such a guide. I state clearly that I shall be very glad to talk with any student regarding his reading if he feels that he would like some personal advice. There are three courses open to the student. He may ignore my suggestion that every college man or woman should keep up his reading in general literature. He may decide to use the list and make his selections without reference to me. He may make up his mind to come to me for more specific information regarding the suggested readings. We shall assume that one student follows the latter course. At the start I explain to him that in my opinion there are two or three principles which may help a person to do the most effective reading. For convenience I shall put the statement of these in direct form.

In the first place, a reader should develop the habit of taking any production for just what it is worth. One needs make no apology for reading very light literature, provided one is never blind to the fact that it is light. I see no reason why a person should be ashamed of reading a *Saturday Evening Post* story unless he makes the mistake of placing it in the same category as the recognized masterpieces of literature and deludes himself with the idea that he is getting just as much value out of one as out of the other. Read light literature, then, as well as heavy, frivolous as well as serious, so long as you assess the production at its true value.

In the second place, as a corollary of this, develop the habit of criticizing—favorably and unfavorably of course—what you read. To criticize effectively try to find out what the author attempted to do; see to what degree he has accomplished his purpose; and then decide whether or not what he attempted to do was worth while.

Finally, do your reading in the most efficient manner possible. Probably it will be necessary to point out only one of the many ways in which this idea of efficiency, taken from the modern business world, may be applied to one's reading. Variety may be the spice of life; but it is at the same time most certainly the secret of efficient reading. To increase the quantity and quality of reading see that it is kept varied. Do not make the mistake of reading just one type, as the novel, or the short story, or history, or biography, for example, but get just as much variety in these forms as possible. If it is practicable to have several books on the shelf at the same time, have a volume of poetry, a volume of drama, a volume of essays, and so on, under way all the time. It is then possible to fit the mood of a given moment with the right book; otherwise many of these spare minutes, which for reading purposes are most precious, will be wasted.

Now, assuming that my student has remained through this harangue, I discuss individual titles with him. I try to accomplish two things: I try to make him see that I thoroughly enjoyed a given book and that I think he will enjoy it likewise; and I try to stimulate a curiosity in it, either by telling him something of interest concerning the author, or by telling him what the book is

about, often reading to him bits from it here and there. For example, in the case of Conrad, I tell him of the romantic life of the man, of his two great passions in youth, one to learn English and the other to sail the seas; how he has become one of the greatest living masters of English prose style; and how through his career as a sailor and sea captain he has become probably the greatest writer of the story of the sea since Cooper. I will tell him of that glorious tale *Typhoon* and of its hero in the person of the thoroughly unimaginative Captain MacWhirr, and of the terrible fight that took place between decks among the cargo of Chinamen when their precious boxes of silver dollars were broken open, as Chinamen and boxes were tossed about by the terrific force of the typhoon. If he is interested enough now to "try" this story, I attempt to make it plain—and convincing—to him that I shall greatly enjoy talking the book over with him when he has completed it. Now in my estimation one of the keenest bits of pleasure in any book comes through the discussion of it with one's friends. We know from everyday experience that joy in work and play thrives with company. As youngsters we found no real fun in playing by ourselves; as grown-ups we find our most delightful work to be that which we can do in company with someone else. Parenthetically I may say that this sums up my idea as to why teaching is one of the most fascinating professions in the world.

It is evident, then, that the conference which comes after my friend has finished his book is as delightful to me as it can possibly be to him, for through this volume we have established a basis of understanding that never existed before. If his interest in this story of Conrad's is great enough, I will suggest others that I think he may enjoy. Especially will I suggest as most desirable reading, now that he knows something of Conrad at first hand, articles and essays on Conrad and his art, such as the essay in Cooper's *Some English Story-Tellers*, Walpole's *Joseph Conrad*, chapters from Curle's *Joseph Conrad*, and the delightful essays to be found in the brochures furnished by Conrad's publishers.

My whole plan in a nutshell is to form a bond of personal friendship with the student in his reading as the means by which he may derive the greatest enjoyment from it; to suggest some guiding

principles so that his reading, whether light or heavy, will be of real value to him; and then to answer the question "What shall I read?" by recommending a few books in which I am sure he will find a reasonable proportion of pleasure and profit. The plan requires, of course, a vast amount of time for personal conferences, for in the majority of cases the student will want to talk about a book both before and after he has read it. But I know of no work in the English course that is more productive of sound and convincing results than this sympathetic guidance of the student in his outside reading at the beginning of his high-school or college course. Ample provision should be made in the curriculum for the teacher who may have charge of this phase of the English work.

As some may be interested in the list that I use, I append it. In the case of collections, such as volumes of short stories and poetry, I always suggest several individual titles, trusting the student to read on if he finds these acceptable.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

NOVELS

Allen, James Lane. *The Choir Invisible*
Atherton, Gertrude. *Before the Gringo Came*
Barrie, James. *The Little Minister*
Cable, George. *The Grandissimes*
Churchill, Winston. *Coniston*
———. *The Crisis*
Conrad, Joseph. *Lord Jim*
———. *Typhoon*
"Craddock, Charles Egbert." *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountain*
Davis, Richard Harding. *A Soldier of Fortune*
Deland, Margaret. *The Awakening of Helena Richie*
———. *The Iron Woman*
Doyle, A. Conan. *A Study in Scarlet*
———. *The Valley of Fear*
Fox, John, Jr. *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*
———. *A Mountain Europa*
Garland, Hamlin. *The Captain of the Grey Horse Troop*
Harben, Will. *Abner Daniel*
Hardy, Thomas. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*
Hope, Anthony. *The Prisoner of Zenda*
Johnston, Mary E. *To Have and to Hold*

Kipling, Rudyard. *Captains Courageous*
———. *Kim*
Locke, William J. *The Beloved Vagabond*
London, Jack. *The Sea Wolf*
Mitchell, S. Weir. *Hugh Wynne*
Nicholson, Meredith. *Otherwise Phyllis*
Norris, Frank. *The Octopus*
———. *The Pit*
Ollivant, Alfred. *Bob, Son of Battle*
Page, Thomas Nelson. *Red Rock*
Sinclair, May. *The Divine Fire*
Tarkington, Booth. *Cherry*
Wharton, Edith. *Ethan Frome*
White, S. E. *Gold*
———. *The Grey Dawn*
Wister, Owen. *The Virginian*
Wiggin, Kate Douglas. *A Cathedral Courtship*
———. *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*

VOLUMES OF SHORT STORIES

Atherton, Gertrude. *The Splendid Idle Forties*
Butler, Ellis P. *Pigs is Pigs*
Cable, George. *Old Creole Days*
Colcord, Lincoln. *The Game of Life and Death*
Conrad, Joseph. *Youth*
Davis, Richard Harding. *Gallegher*
———. *Van Bibber*
Deland, Margaret. *Old Chester Tales*
Doyle, A. Conan. *The Adventures of Brigadier Gerard*
———. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*
Ferber, Edna. *Buttered Side Down*
Freeman, Mary E. Wilkins. *A Humble Romance*
———. *A New England Nun*
Garland, Hamlin. *Main Travelled Roads*
Gerould, Katherine. *Vain Oblations*
Gillmore, Inez. *Phoebe and Ernest*
Glass, Montague. *Abe and Mawruss*
Hardy, Thomas. *Life's Little Ironies*
Henry, O. *The Four Million*
———. *The Heart of the West*
———. *Roads and Destiny*
Hurst, Fannie. *Just around the Corner*
Kipling, Rudyard. *Actions and Reactions*
———. *The Day's Work*

London, Jack. *The Night-Born*
———. *The Strength of the Strong*
Norris, Frank. *A Deal in Wheat*
Page, Thomas Nelson. *In Ole Virginia*
Tarkington, Booth. *The Beautiful Lady*
———. *Monsieur Beaucaire*
Van Dyke, Henry. *The Blue Flower*
Webster, Henry. *The Painted Scene*
Wharton, Edith. *Crucial Instances*
Williams, Jesse Lynch. *The Stolen Story*
Wister, Owen. *Philosophy Four*
Zangwill, I. *King of the Schnorrers*
Zola, Emile. *The Attack on the Mill*

VOLUMES OF POETRY

Aiken, Conrad. *Turns and Movies*
Brooke, Rupert. *Collected Poems*
Burnet, Dana. *Poems*
Chesterton, G. K. *Poems*
Davis, Fannie S. *Crack o' Dawn*
Drummond, William H. *Complete Poems*
Frost, Robert. *North of Boston*
Gibson, Wilfred W. *Daily Bread*
———. *Fires*
Guiterman, Arthur. *The Laughing Muse*
Kipling, Rudyard. *Collected Verse*
Lindsay, Vachel. *The Congo*
Lowell, Amy. *Men, Women, and Ghosts*
Marquis, Don. *Dreams and Dust*
Masefield, John. *Salt Water Ballads*
Masters, E. L. *The Spoon River Anthology*
Neihardt, John. *The Quest*
Noyes, Alfred. *Collected Poems*
Peabody, Josephine. *The Singing Man*
Riley, James Whitcomb. *The Hoosier Book of Riley Verse*
———. *The Lockerbie Book of Riley Verse*
Service, Robert. *The Spell of the Yukon*
Teasdale, Sarah. *Rivers to the Sea*
Widdemer, Margaret. *Factories*

Anthologies

Braithwaite, W. S. (Editor). *Anthology of Magazine Verse for 1913.* Also for 1914 and 1915
Garvin, W. (Editor). *Anthology of Canadian Verse*

Quiller-Couch, A. (Editor). *Oxford Book of English Verse*
———. *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*
———. *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*
Richards, Mrs. Waldo (Editor). *High Tides*
Rittenhouse, Jessie B. (Editor). *The Little Book of Modern Verse*
Stevenson, Burton E. *The Home Book of Verse*

VOLUMES OF DRAMA

Barrie, James. *Half Hours*
Bennett, Arnold. *Milestones*
Fitch, Clyde. *Barbara Fritchie*
———. *Nathan Hale*
Galsworthy, John. *Strife*
———. *Justice*
Houghton, Stanley. *Hindle Wakes*
Hauseman, L., and Barker, Granville. *Prunella*
Jerome, J. K. *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*
———. *Adventures of Lady Ursula*
Jones, Henry A. *The Theatre of Ideas*
Kennedy, C. R. *The Servant in the House*
Knoblauch, E. *Kismet*
Mackay, Constance. *Beau Brummel*
Maeterlinck, M. *The Blue Bird*
Middleton, G. *Embers and other One-Act Plays*
———. *Tradition and other One-Act Plays*
Moody, W. V. *The Great Divide*
Rostand, E. *Chantecler*
———. *Cyrano de Bergerac*
Sheldon, E. *The Nigger*
———. *Romance*
Tarkington, Booth, and Wilson, H. L. *The Man from Home*
Thomas, Augustus. *Arizona*
Wilde, Percival. *Dawn and other One-Act Plays*
———. *Confessional and other One-Act Plays*
Wisconsin Plays. Four one-act plays by various authors
Yeats, W. B. *The Hour-Glass*
Zangwill, I. *The Melting Pot*

VOLUMES OF ESSAYS

Burroughs, John. *Ways of Nature*
Chesterton, G. K. *All Things Considered*
Cooper, F. T. *Some American Story-Tellers*
———. *Some English Story-Tellers*

Crothers, Samuel. *Humanly Speaking*
Leacock, Stephen. *Essays and Literary Studies*
More, Paul. *Shelburne Essays*
Phelps, William Lyon. *Essays on Modern Novelists*
———. *Essays on Russian Novelists*
———. *Essays on Books*
Repplier, Agnes. *Compromises*
Wilson, Woodrow. *When a Man Comes to Himself*

VOLUMES OF BIOGRAPHY

Antin, Mary. *The Promised Land*
Bradford, Gamaliel. *Union Portraits*
———. *Lee, the American*
London, Jack. *John Barleycorn*
Lounsbury, Thomas. *The Life of Cooper*
Morse, John T., Jr. *Abraham Lincoln*
Payne, Albert B. *Mark Twain: A Biography*
Palmer, George. *The Life of Alice Freeman Palmer*
Rothchild, A. *Lincoln, the Master of Men*
Smith, C. A. *O. Henry Biography*
Tarbell, Ida M. *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*
Wilson, Woodrow. *George Washington*

VOLUMES OF HISTORY

Fiske, John. *The American Revolution*
Hart, A. B. (Editor). *Epochs of American History*, 3 vols.
——— (Editor). *The American Nation*, 27 vols.
McMaster, J. B. *A History of the People of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War*
Parkman, Francis. *The Jesuits in America*
Trevelyan, G. O. *The American Revolution*
Wilson, Woodrow. *A History of the United States*